

## **Real Stories of Young Entrepreneurs in Wisconsin**

**Name:** Katerina (Kat) Terwelp

**School & Grade:** Longfellow Middle School, Wauwatosa

**Business Name:** MT Brain Gang

**What inspired you to start your business? Tell us about your inspiration, your idea and how it became a reality.**

When I was in fifth grade I noticed a problem worth solving. Books were falling every five minutes with the occasional "Sorry!" added on – teaching was impossible. By the time school had finished I had an idea. The books falling off the desks needed to be stopped. What's a better way to stop things from falling than by "catching" them? On a post-it note I scribbled a sketch of my idea. My mom looked at the picture and knew exactly how to make my idea...will, with a little help from my dad. With my creativity, dad's engineering skills, and mom's graphic design eye, the TopKatcher was formed.

In fifth grade we had a mini-economy project that included market days. On market days we would open up a "shop" and sell to other students. The TopKatchers were a hit! Every one bought one whether they had a lift-lid desk or a flat table for a desk. The teachers loved them too. I even had sign-up sheets between market days to take orders. It was such a huge success that my dad did a patent search on Google. Now the TopKatcher is patent-pending and I hope to one day become an official inventory with my name on a patent.

**Describe your product / service, purpose / goals, features / benefits, unique selling point.**

My family started this business because of my invention and we called this business the MT Brain Gang. I like to say that we call the business, the MT Brain Gain because our brains are empty. Just kidding! In fact our brains are far from empty. The "MT" is my dad's initials and we like the funny play on words it gives. My family is really unique and we have the same sense of humor.

The TopKatcher is the main product right now for our business. But we plan on expanding the company by offering additions to the TopKatcher. The TopKatcher can be as unique as "you." The TopKatcher has as many uses as you can think of. Students decorate it and add things to it, for instance, post-it notes as reminders. They use as a personal bulletin board. Teachers put name tags on the backboard which makes it easy for them to see the student's name. Teachers can use the bulletin board feature also by adding behavior charts, assignments, schedules, and reminders. Once again I show you how the TopKatcher can catch the eye of students and teacher alike. Along with the books and papers that try to fall off their desks.

Now about that expansion idea that I have. We have several ideas in mind for adding on to the TopKatcher. My brother came up with the "pocket idea". This is where (like a kangaroo) the TopKatcher is fitted with a pocket that can hold paper-thin items inside. This is helpful for interchangeable items that you wish to put up on top of the TopKatcher. This way you can see that item and you will not lose it, because it's right in front of you.

Right now we're looking for a larger school supply manufacturer to license by product. While doing this, we're also selling the TopKatcher to nearby schools, on our website ([www.topkatcher.com](http://www.topkatcher.com)), and Amazon. I'm hoping people will see the advantages of my invention.

No one else has created this before. I find this remarkable because my invention is such a simple solution.

**Tell us about yourself and how you make your business succeed.**

I guess it's time to talk about ME! My favorite pastime is to draw – I do it constantly. There has never been a day without my drawing something. Whether it's a doodle or a well-thought out drawing. It only makes sense that I'm good at drawing, especially since I do it constantly. The ideas that I have that I cannot say; I can draw. The TopKatcher started with a sketch on a post-it note. I also have sketches of add-ons for the product. Being able to show what's inside your head on paper helps when you work with people who can make your idea become a reality.

Another thing I do all the time is read. My teachers say that I go into a coma when I read and you literally have to yell to get my nose out of a book. A wise man once said that knowledge comes from books. (Well at least that's why I say.) Without knowledge I wouldn't have been able to come up with a solution to any of my problems. (I have a lot of problems...trust me.) We'll talk about my many problems later. Well the problems dealing with the TopKatchers.

My creative mind made the business and now it's helping it succeed. How does my creative mind help? In a business you need to be creative. Without this creativeness you wouldn't have a business or invention. The problem that I faced has been around for a hundred years! It took a hundred years for someone creative enough to think up a solution. I bet even you (the reader) has faced this problem many times in school.

I'm a great spokesperson for our business because I am not afraid to talk in front of a crowd. I act in plays every single year. Someone with this kind of talent is very hard to find. One of the number one fears in the world is the fear of talking in front of a crowd. I don't have that fear.

Some problems my invention faced was what adhesive to use. Testing was one of the ways to solve this problem. We got samples of different adhesives and put them underneath different colored TopKatchers. Then we waited a few months to see which adhesive survived the tyrannical reign of the fifth graders. One stood out from the rest. The winner? An acrylic hi-bond adhesive tape. The winner got pulled off the desk easily and didn't lose its hold on the desk.

Another problem that the TopKatcher solved (through testing) was the pocket. We got feedback from the kids saying the way we made the pockets wasn't working. The pockets kept falling off. Ugh. That's when we decided to change how we made pockets. Instead we made a peel-on pocket. It's kind of like a sticker. This then gave us the idea of making add-ons. Sometimes problems lead to new ideas.

**What are your future goals and vision for your business? How do you propose to develop your business?**

My goal is to have teachers around the world buying and using TopKatchers like they buy pencils and books. I want Walmart, Office Max, and other big chain stores to have my product on their shelves. I know this is a big goal, but I have a big idea and I'm determined to show it to the world.